British Columbia Wildlife Watch

Provincial Viewing Program

A View For The Future
Business Plan — 2002 • 2006

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Prepared by:
Wildlife Branch —
Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
Federation of BC Naturalists

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What is British Columbia Wildlife Watch?

British Columbia Wildlife Watch **IS A MULTI-PARTNER PROGRAM DESIGNED TO PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL, RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES TO VIEW FISH AND WILDLIFE IN THEIR NATURAL HABITATS. ESTABLISHED IN 1989, IT ENCOURAGES PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF WILDLIFE AND HABITAT. ANOTHER IMPORTANT PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM IS TO PROMOTE PUBLIC INTEREST IN AND SUPPORT FOR SPECIES CONSERVATION AND HABITAT PROTECTION.**

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Introduction

People enjoy our wildlife by viewing it, participating in nature studies, photographing or sketching nature scenes, feeding birds and providing and protecting native vegetation or other wildlife habitat. Participation in these activities is growing, increasing from 23.5 percent of the Province's population in 1983 to 29 percent in 1996. This participation presents both aesthetic and economic benefits but it carries the risk of damaging or destroying the wild species and habitats it celebrates.

WILDLIFE VIEWING STATISTICS

- British Columbia hosts 142 mammal, 488 bird, 22 amphibian, 18 reptile and 468 fish species.
- A 1996 survey of wildlife-related activities found that 863,430 B.C. residents took trips and outings where the main purpose was to watch, photograph or field study wildlife.[1]
- Participants spent almost 18 million days in the field viewing wildlife in 1996 and spent almost $392 million on transportation, food, accommodation, equipment and other items.
- A U.S. Fish and Wildlfie Service survey estimated that U.S. visitors to Canada spent more than $700 (Can) million on wildlife viewing and recreational fishing.

Spending on wildlife viewing, by B.C. residents and tourists, makes an important contribution to the provincial economy and supports employment in many rural parts of the Province where economic alternatives are limited.

Wildlife viewing opportunities are of paramount importance to the quality of life for our citizens and to our ability to attract tourists, especially to remote areas of the Province. The mission of the Wildlife Watch Program is to increase wildlife viewing opportunities while protecting wild species and habitats so wildlife viewing remains a valued activity in B.C. far into the future.

. . . the mission of the British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program is to increase wildlife viewing opportunities while protecting wild species and habitats . . .

Wildlife Watch identifies and supports development of wildlife viewing sites, provides information to increase viewer enjoyment and offers education aimed at conserving wildlife and wildlife habitats. The Program works with partners from government, communities and industry who treasure our wildlife heritage and want to protect it for future generations.

1 (*Economic Value of Wildlife Activities in British Columbia 1996*, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1998)

Watch With Respect

In promoting wildlife viewing, the overriding concern of the Wildlife Watch Program has been to convey the message that viewing should be done in a responsible manner. This includes not causing stress to wildlife, damage to habitat or risk to human safety. It also respects private property and the enjoyment of other viewers. Guidelines (see sidebar) encourage safety for viewers and their subjects. Viewers are further encouraged to learn to recognize signs of stress in animals and to sit quietly or slowly back away when stress is observed.

British Columbia Wildlife Watch adopts the definition of wildlife set out in the Wildlife Policy for Canada. Thus, wildlife refers to all wild organisms and their habitats including wild plants, invertebrates, microorganisms, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Past, Present, Future

A great deal was accomplished in the early years of the Program.

- Plans were completed for all Management Regions, setting out an inventory of potential viewing sites and establishing priorities and schedules for their development.
- Plans were developed for 57 specific sites that included descriptions of species and habitats at the site, species and habitat sensitivities, secondary features, facility requirements, interpretative needs and priorities, marketing and management.
- A number of sites were developed, some with facilities and trails, directional signs and brochures.
- A *British Columbia Wildlife Viewing Guide* was published.
- *Viewing Ethics for Conservation* were developed and included in many Program viewing brochures.

WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDELINES

- *Be considerate of wildlife:* Use binoculars, spotting scopes or telephoto lenses to view wildlife from a distance. Do not approach closely.
- *Be considerate of habitat:* Plants and landscapes are important parts of wildlife habitat. Please do not damage or remove them, and stay on designated trails or roads.
- *Be considerate of other people:* Respect private property and fellow wildlife viewers as well as other activities in the area.
- *Be wary of wildlife:* Some wildlife becomes accustomed to human presence and human food. Please do not feed wildlife. Also, many species of wildlife can be very unpredictable and dangerous, so maintain a safe distance.
- *Control pets:* Pets can harm wildlife and habitats and hinder viewing opportunities. Keep pets on a leash.
- *Do not approach young wildlife:* Young wildlife are rarely abandoned or lost. An adult is usually close by and waiting for you to leave.

2 (Wildlife Minister's Council of Canada, 1990)

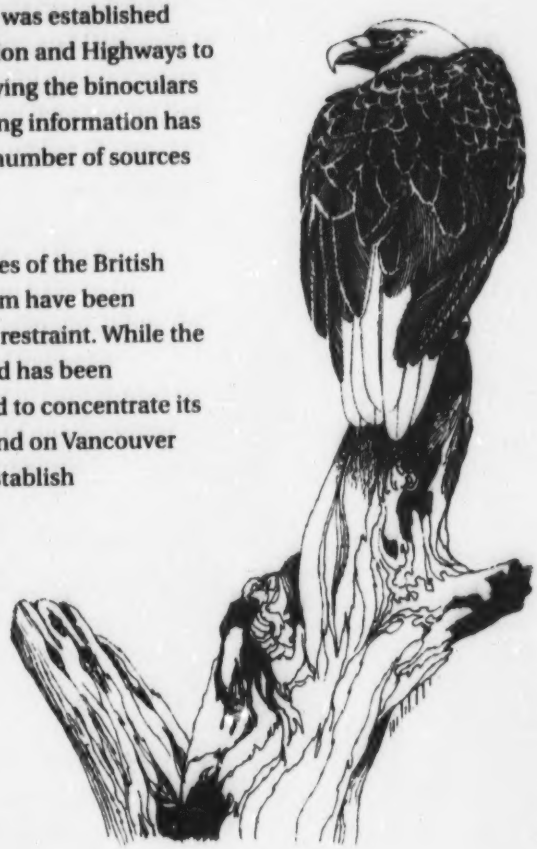
INFORMATION SOURCES

The Program has provided information through a number of sources, including:

- Quarterly newsletter: *Eyes on Wildlife*
- Talks and slide shows
- Web site
- Area and site brochures
- Participation in and promotion of festivals and events
- *British Columbia Recreational Atlas* (an inventory of sites, their characteristics and locations)
- Beautiful British Columbia Magazine's *Travel Guide*, produced by Tourism BC, identifies viewing opportunities at different sites.
- A partnership with Western Phone Directories provides a page in phone directories for some communities that lists five or six local area viewing sites and information about the Program.

The early years also saw completion of a marketing strategy and annual surveys to monitor public awareness. A partnership was established with the Ministry of Transportation and Highways to place and maintain signs displaying the binoculars logo on highways. Wildlife viewing information has been made available through a number of sources (see sidebar).

Since about 1994, the activities of the British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program have been gradually curtailed due to fiscal restraint. While the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund has been supportive, the Program has had to concentrate its efforts in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island. The Program needs to establish adequate ongoing funding to continue promoting viewing opportunities, monitoring sites, and providing information and education that will ensure a sustainable future for wildlife viewing throughout British Columbia.



The Five-Year Plan

The purpose of this Plan is to provide direction for the development of the British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program over the next five years. It is intended to build on and further the successes of the past. The plan recognizes the fiscal constraints facing government and proposes a fresh direction for the Program's management. As such, the plan provides a framework for co-operative efforts and partnerships with government agencies, non-government organizations, First Nations, community groups and private interests.

I. Program Goals

The goals of the British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program are to:

- Ensure the activities of the Program are consistent with the well-being of wildlife and its habitat. This is the Program's highest priority.
- Promote and enhance opportunities to see and enjoy wildlife.
- Support tourism and economic benefits associated with responsible wildlife viewing.
- Promote increased public understanding and awareness of and support for wildlife and its habitat needs.

II. Objectives & Actions

The following objectives and actions are proposed to achieve the goals of the Program.

1. Develop British Columbia Wildlife Watch as a province-wide, partnership-based program that has a stable funding base and is largely self-sustaining. Day-to-day management of the Program will be by non-government groups with monitoring and evaluation by government agencies to ensure environmental integrity is maintained.

Required Actions:

- Establish a partnership management committee for the Program to develop and set out terms of reference and responsibilities in a memorandum of understanding.
- Appoint a full-time program coordinator.
- Establish appropriate short-term funding.
- Investigate establishing a trust or endowment fund to provide long-term support for the Program.
- Establish an appropriate organizational structure that will allow for day-to-day management of the Program by partners with government monitoring.

2. Foster partnerships for the joint development, management and maintenance of viewing opportunities and sites. Foster both local and province-wide development, production and distribution of educational materials.

Required Actions

- Develop partnerships for site development, maintenance and monitoring with local, regional, provincial and federal governments and their agencies, non-government organizations, First Nations, tour operators and other businesses.

- Build partnerships with various government and non-government agencies to develop, produce and distribute educational and informational materials.

- Form partnerships with local groups for the planning and development of festivals and special events.

3. Ensure the planning and implementation of a system of viewing sites throughout the Province represents a mix of ecosystems and habitats, wildlife and other natural features.

Required Actions

- Complete or update regional viewing and site development plans.

- Implement site plans including facility construction and site brochures.

- Ensure sites are maintained and use is monitored for impacts.

4. Work with partners to increase the public's awareness of viewing opportunities and to ensure a proper code of wildlife viewing conduct is followed.

Required Actions

- Update the viewing code of ethics, as needed; develop a brochure to promote viewing ethics and emphasize the code in all viewing publications.
- Revise and re-print the provincial viewing site brochure *Wildlife Viewing in British Columbia* and add to the wildlife viewing web site.
- Develop, print and distribute site and area viewing brochures and bird checklists; make them available on the Wildlife Watch web site.
- Update information about viewing sites in the *BC Recreational Atlas*, Beautiful British Columbia Magazine's *Travel Guide* and in the Wildlife Watch *Eyes on Wildlife* newsletter.

5. Support and participate in the development of appropriate commercial products and tourism services that meet the needs of wildlife and of wildlife viewing participants.

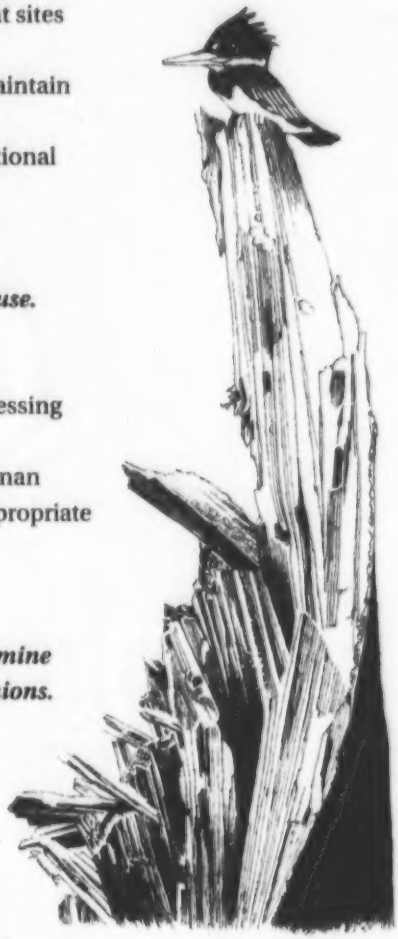
Required Actions

- Encourage and participate in broad consultative processes to develop guidelines for local recreational and commercial wildlife viewing activities.
- Provide support to suppliers of viewing goods and services by authorizing use of binoculars logo.
- Provide support for planning, implementing and promoting local wildlife events and festivals.
- Provide information on viewing participation and expenditures to highlight importance of viewing to tourism.

6. Promote public awareness and knowledge of wildlife and ecosystems through informational and educational materials.

Required Actions

- Maintain and update wildlife information and schedule of events and festivals on British Columbia Wildlife Watch's web site and in the *Eyes on Wildlife* newsletter.
- Provide displays and display materials to trade shows, special events and conferences.
- Partner with educational programs to develop wildlife viewing modules that might highlight sites as classrooms.
- Support partnerships to develop and maintain interpretative centres at suitable sites.
- Support partnerships for other informational facilities as appropriate.



7. Monitor area and site use and impacts of use.

Required Actions

- Develop criteria for monitoring and assessing impacts on viewing sites.
- Monitor sites for adverse impacts of human activity on wildlife and its habitat and take appropriate action where unacceptable impacts occur.

8. Evaluate Program effectiveness and determine public's viewing needs, preferences and opinions.

Required Actions

- Develop criteria to evaluate effectiveness of Program activities.
- Undertake public surveys to determine opinions about wildlife viewing and knowledge of Wildlife Watch.
- Evaluate effectiveness of Wildlife Watch Program based on the public awareness of the Program and rate of participation in viewing and appreciation of ethical viewing practices.

III. Timeline for Key Actions

The following schedule sets out the key action items that are to be undertaken by the Wildlife Watch Program over the next five years.

YEAR ONE

- Appoint full-time coordinator.
- Revise/reprint provincial viewing brochure and put on web site.
- Revise viewing code of ethics and include in brochures.
- Develop guidelines for commercial wildlife viewing activities.
- Develop program evaluation criteria.
- Ongoing activities (see below).

YEAR TWO

- Investigate establishing a trust or endowment fund to support program.
- Review/update regional viewing plans.
- Ongoing activities (see below).

YEAR THREE

- Evaluate program effectiveness.
- Undertake public surveys of program awareness.
- Monitor sites for adverse impacts on wildlife and habitats.
- Ongoing activities (see below).

YEAR FOUR

- Establish trust to manage funds.
- Ongoing activities (see below).

YEAR FIVE

- Establish day-to-day management by non-profit organization with government direction.
- Ongoing activities (see below).

ONGOING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

- Develop partnerships for:
  - *site planning, development, operation and maintenance*
  - *monitoring and evaluating use*
  - *production and distribution of educational material*
  - *hosting of festivals and special events*
  - *preparation of site brochures and bird checklists*
- Update site viewing information for other publications such as *Beautiful BC Magazine's Travel Guide* and *Eyes on Wildlife* newsletter.
- Maintain web site and *Eyes on Wildlife* newsletter.
- Provide information for educational modules, conferences, trade shows, events and festivals.
- Support partnerships that develop and maintain interpretative centres.
- Support appropriate commercial viewing opportunities.

IV. What You Can Do

The British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program has created wildlife viewing opportunities that have educational, recreational and commercial benefits while preserving and protecting our priceless wildlife heritage.

SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

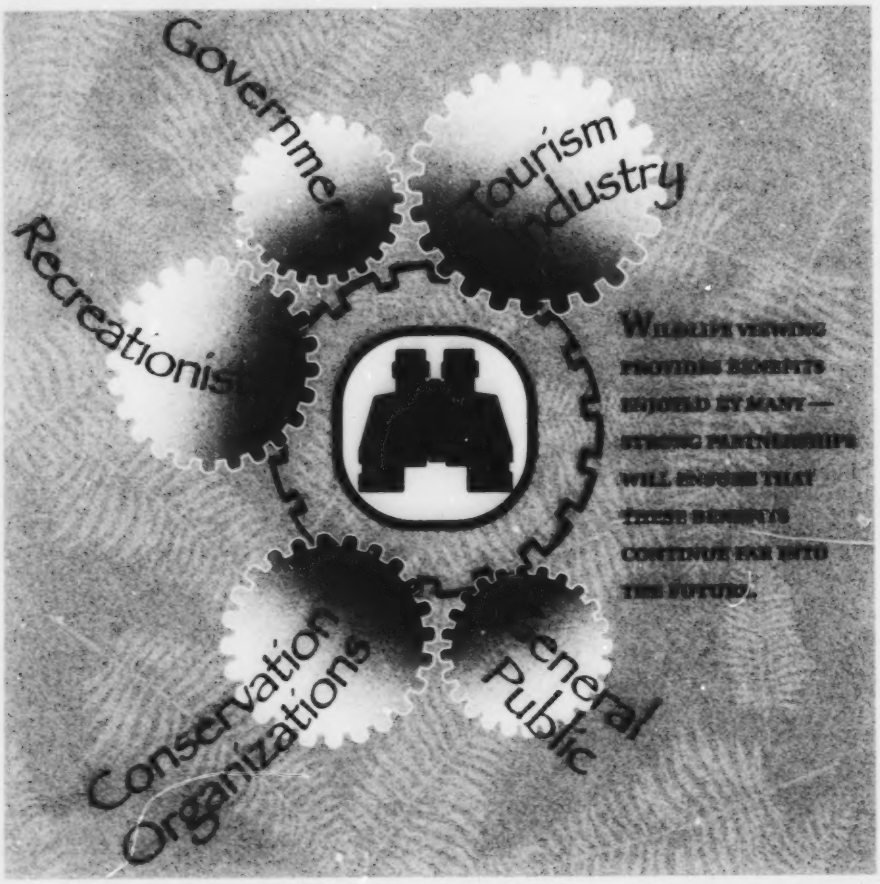
Wildlife Watch has been supported by: Federation of BC Naturalists, BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, and Wild Bird Trust of BC. Various other corporations, community organizations and agencies have contributed funds for the printing of brochures and other educational materials.

Given the current climate of fiscal restraint in government, the future of the wildlife viewing program depends more than ever on the support of an interested public. Its support and strength now must come from mutually beneficial partnerships and creative fund-raising efforts both province-wide and in local communities.

Wildlife viewing is an important economic activity that produces commercial benefits throughout the Province. It is estimated that about 870,000 provincial residents take wildlife viewing trips and outings each year and spend about $400 million on these activities. This spending on viewing trips and outings supports the equivalent of a full year of employment for 4,200 provincial residents and generates over $68 million in revenues for governments. Much of this spending takes place in towns and villages and rural parts of the Province where economic and employment alternatives are limited.

There is a unique opportunity for individuals, organizations and companies to be involved in the British Columbia Wildlife Watch Program in a number of ways:

- become a partner in any of the many Wildlife Watch activities;
- assist in fund-raising efforts;
- promote and distribute viewing materials and code of viewing ethics;
- sponsor or support signs, brochures, interpretative centres and other facilities and services at a viewing site;
- sponsor a wildlife viewing site.



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Further information

To become involved in the Program, to obtain more information about Wildlife Watch or a copy of the detailed background paper to this business plan, please contact:

Federation of BC Naturalists
425 — 1367 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6H 4A9
Telephone: 604.737.3057

Program Officer, Wildlife Program
Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
P.O. Box 9374, STN PROV GOV
Victoria, BC, CANADA V8W 9M4
Telephone: 250.387.9737